DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 931 CG 023 273

AUTHOR Richards-Govere, Kimberly A. M.
TITLE The Effects of Membership-Group Similarity on Counseling Process and Outcome.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Client Characteristics (Human Services); *Counseling; Counseling Effectiveness; Counselor Client Relationship; Ethnic Groups; Group Membership; *Outcomes of Treatment

ABSTRACT

Recent studies suggest that membership-group similarity may be a strong motivator in initiating a counseling relationship, but that similarities in attitudes, experiences, and cognition affect the counseling process and outcome. In addition, within group differences between members of the same ethnic group affect the counseling process and outcome. The theories discussed in this paper can be categorized into two basic groups. The first group (Congruity Theory, Balance Theory, and Theory of Identificatory Process) proposes that membership-group similarity gives credibility to the communicator, if the receiver and the communicator belong to the same membership group. The second group of theories (Dissonance Theory, Instrumental Value Theory, and the Theory of Racial Consciousness) propose that membership-group similarity has no effect on the counseling process and outcome unless it is perceived as having an instrumental value by the client. A recent study found that similarities in attitudes, values, and personality traits may be important variables in the counseling process and outcome, and that it is not appropriate to assign clients to counselors based solely on membership-group similarity. The historical misconception that membership-group similarity has in itself an effect on the counseling process and outcome has been exposed, and the variables which do have an effect on the counseling process and outcome are being defined. What is now lacking in the literature is the degree to which each variable contributes to the effectiveness of the counseling process and outcome and whether those variables are significant to all the prevalent ethnic groups. (LLL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED330931

THE EFFECTS OF MEMBERSHIP-GROUP SIMILARITY ON COUNSELING PROCESS AND OUTCOME

Kimberly A. M. Richards - Govere

Graduate Student

Department of Education

University of North Alabama

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG023273

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kimberly R. Govere

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper was to examine, through literature review, the effects of membership-group similarity on counseling process and outcome. Prior to the 1970's it was generally believed that membership-group similarity played an important role in the process and outcome of the counseling dyad. Recent studies suggest that similarities in attitudes, experiences and cognition have a greater impact on the counseling process and outcome than membership-group similarity does.

Literature Search

There is an ongoing search for and debate on whether client and counselor should belong to the same membership-group (e.g. sex, race, age, or ethnic similiarty) in order to facilitate effective counseling. Prior to 1970 only three studies on racial experimenter effect were in print. Since 1970 over 80 studies have investigated the ethnic variables on counseling process and outcome (Atkinson, Poston, Furlong and Mercado, 1989). In early studies Minnick (1957) and Berscheid (1966) concluded that membership-group similarity could be used to the advantage of the communicator as it was perceived as being an effective persuasion technique. That is, a receiver would be open to attitude change if the communicator belonged to the same membership-group as the receiver. However, Simmons, Berkowitz and Moyer (1970) and Banks (1975) stated that membership-group similarity did not in itself give credibility to the communicator.

Recent studies suggest that membership-group similarity may be a strong motivator in initiating a counseling relationship, but that similarities in attitudes, experiences and cognition effect the

counseling process and outcome (Ponterotto, Alexander and Hinkston, 1988 and Atkinson, 1983). In addition, within group differences between members of the same ethnic group (ethnic diversity) would effect the counseling process and outcome (Atkinson and Schein, 1986). For example, an Afro-American in the pre-encounter stage of self-actualization would reject a black counselor because in the pre-encounter stage one's blackness is denied and whiteness is idealized and strongly identified with (Helms, 1985 b). The theories behind the aforementioned studies are the Congruity Theory (Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955), the Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), Balance Theory (Abelson and Rosenberg, 1958), Theory of Identificatory Process (Bandura, 1969), Instrumental Value Theory (Simmons et al, 1970) and the Theory of Racial Consciousness (Helms, 1985 b).

These theories can be categorized into two basic groups. The first group which includes the Congruity Theory, Balance Theory and the Theory of Identificatory Process, proposes that membership-group similarity gives credibility to the communicator, if the receiver and the communicator belong to the same membership-group.

Osgood and Tannenbaum's (1955) Congruity Theory assumes that equilibrium would be created between members of an incongruent bond because imbalance is repugnant to human nature. However, incredulity would have to be subtracted from the predicted attitude change and as incredulity increased it would negate any change. Similar to the Congruity Theory is the Balance Theory (Abelson and Rosenberg, 1958). However, there are some differences between the two models. For instance in Balance Theory an imbalance between members in a bond does not alone suffice to generate an attitude change. Bandura's (1969) Theory of Identificatory Process states that if similarities between bond members are reinforced then identification would occur and credulity would develop between bond members. These three theories support the idea that client and counselor should belong to the same membership-group in order to facilitate effective counseling.

The second group of theories include the Dissonance Theory, Instrumental Value Theory and the Theory of Racial Consciousness. These theories propose that membership-group similarity has no effect on the counseling process and outcome unless it is

perceived as having an instrumental value by the client.

The Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957) states that when an organism perceives that it is incompatible with its environment then dissonance (discord) is created within the organism. This discord would bring about "goal directed action" which would reduce the dissonance. Unlike the Congruity Theory where incredulity will diminish or nullify any attitude change, a balance can be created between members of an incongruent bond, without incredulity interfering in the balancing process. Simmon's et al (1970) Instrumental Value Theory states that counselor attraction may not significantly effect a change of attitude, dissimilarity between a receiver and a source could enhance the credibility of the source and that similarity or dissimilarity between a receiver and a source will be of value in the counseling dyad only if it is perceived by the receiver as having an instrumental value. The Theory of Racial Consciousness (Helms, 1985 b) recognizes that even in any ethnically affiliated membership-group, there is a degree of ethnic diversity within its members. The aforementioned three theories support the hypothesis

that membership-group similarity has no effect on the counseling process and outcome unless it is perceived as having an instrumental value by the client, but that membership-group similarity may be important in initiating the counseling relationship.

A recent study by Atkinson, Poston, Furlong and Mercado (1989) also supports the above hypothesis. They found that similarities in attitudes, values and personality traits may be important variables in regards to the counseling process and outcome. They concluded that it was not appropriate to assign clients to counselors based solely on membership-group similarity.

Conclusion

The historical misconception that membership-group similarity has in itself an effect on the counseling process and outcome has been exposed and the variables which do have an effect on the counseling process and outcome are being defined. What is now lacking in the literature is the degree to which each variable contributes to the effectiveness of the counseling process and outcome and whether those variables are significant in regards to all the prevalent ethnic groups.

References

Abelson, R. P., Rosenberg, M. J. (1958). Symbolic Psychologic: A model of attitudinal cognition. Behavioral Science, 3, 1-13.

Atkinson, D. R. (1983). Ethnic similarity in counseling psychology: A review of research. The Counseling Psychologist, 11 (3), 79-92.

Atkinson, D. R., Poston, W. C., Furlong, J. J. and Mercado, P. (1989). Ethnic group preferences for counselor characteristics. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 36(1), 68-72.

Atkinson, D. R. and Schein, S. (1986). Similarity in counseling. The Counseling Psychologist, 14, 319-353.

Bandura, A. (1969). Social Learning Theory of Identificatory Process. In D. A. Goslin (Ed.), Handbook of socialization and theory research (pp. 212-262). Chicago: Rand McNally

Banks, H. C. (1975). The black person as client and as a therapist. Professional Psychology, 8, 470-475.

Berscheid, E. (1966). Opinion change and communicator-communicatee similarity and dissimilarity. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 4, 670-680.

Festinger, L. A. (1957). A theory of cognitive dissonance. New York: Row and Peterson.

Helms, J. (1985 b). Toward a theoretical explanation of the effects of race on counseling: A black and white model. The Counseling Psychologist, 12(4), 153-165.

Minnick, W. C. (1957). The art of persuasion. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Osgood, C. E., Tannenbaum, P. H. (1955). The principle of congruity in the prediction of attitude change. Psychological Review, 62, 42-55.

Ponterotto, J. G., Alexander, C. and Hinkston, J. (1988). Afro-American preferences for counselor characteristics: A replication and extension. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 35, 175-182.

Simmons, H. W., Berkowitz, N. N. and Moyer, R. J. (1970). Similarity, credibility and attitude changes: A review and a theory. Psychological Bulletin, 73, 1-16.